

KA JINGSNENG TYNKEN
(THE TEACHINGS OF ELDERS)



A Translation By Bruce Tynken

KA JINGSNENG TYMMEN
(THE TEACHINGS OF ELDERS)

Radhon Singh Berry

A Translation by Bijoya Sawian

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PART I

About the Author and His work

Radhon Singh Berry Kharwanlang was born in Mawmluh (near Cherrapunjee) around 1850. His personal life is relatively unknown as none of the usual details of his childhood, education and profession were ever recorded. Brief references are made by his biographers of his two marriages and five children, two from the earlier union and three from the latter.

Radhon Singh Berry is remembered and famous for his commendable literary achievements. He was, along with Rabon Singh Suka and Jeebon Roy Mairom, responsible for perfecting the written Khasi language. After the British missionaries had introduced the Roman alphabet in 1841 he kept the pronunciation intact and completed the alphabet by adding the letters *ñ* and *ng* and dropping the letters *c*, *z*, *f*, *v*, *x* and *q*. There are now 23 letters in the Khasi alphabet *a*, *b*, *k*, *d*, *e*, *g*, *ng*, *h*, *i*, *ĩ*, *j*, *l*, *m*, *n*, *ñ*, *o*, *p*, *r*, *s*, *t*, *u*, *w*, *y*. Before this development ours was a purely oral tradition and important documents were recorded in the Bengali script. In April 1899 Jeebon Roy published the first Khasi Reader “*Ka Kitab Pule Nyngkong*” in which he and Radhon Singh Berry introduced the complete alphabet and correct spellings for the first time ever.

Radhon Singh Berry’s masterpiece is, without doubt, “*Ka Jingsneng Tymmen*”, his compilation of the Khasi moral code and rules of etiquette. The Khasis believe that there is a divine covenant made between them and the Almighty that we come into this world to earn and propagate righteousness, to live in society according to the divine commandments and to work for its benefit, to venerate our ancestors and respect our

elders, our kith and kin and cherish all God's creations, to worship God and God alone. Righteous living leads to inner and outer harmony and consequently to the well-being of one and all. "Ka Jingsneng Tymmen" encapsules the essence of the Khasi philosophy of life.

Radhon Singh Berry delves into the deep recesses of the human mind and guides one step by step through the seemingly simple path of day to day living. He details the way one should eat, sit, speak, attire; the advantages of early rising and industriousness; the importance of abstinence from drugs and drinks; the evil of greed, envy and overindulgence; how to behave while travelling, visiting people and mixing with the opposite sex; how, why, and when one should respect Man, revere our ancestors and worship our Creator. All this and much much more.

'Ka Jingsneng Tymmen' was first published in "U Khasi Mynta" in February 1897. It had a hundred and twelve lines. In March 1897 he added another ninety two lines. In December 1902 Part I was published in book form by Jeebon Roy at the Ri Khasi Press. The following year Book II was also published. It was written in R. S. Berry's inimitable style : two lines consisting of ten syllables rhyming perfectly throughout. Book I has forty one stanzas and Book II has sixty eight stanzas.

Radhon Singh Berry was a sensitive and reflective man. He also wrote beautiful songs for the Brahmo Samaj, the Seng Khasi and the Unitarians. He was a progressive man in thought and spirit. He was born a Khasi who practised the traditional religion. Later he studied Christianity for a few years, reverted

back to the Khasi religion and eventually, along with Hajom Kissor Singh, founded his own, “Ka Niam Wei Blei”.* Later when the foreign Unitarian missionaries came to the Khasi Hills he found an affinity with their religious beliefs and merged with them.

Radhon Singh Berry died when he was just a little over fifty years old. He was at that time involved in compiling the English-Khasi Dictionary.

The Religion of One God.

Bijoya Sawian.

INTRODUCTION

Bijoya Sawian has done a laudable work in rendering Part I of *Ka Jingsneng Tymmen* from Khasi into English. We look forward to the early rendering of Part II as well. *Ka Jingsneng Tymmen* is a small but important little book within the covers of which lie the gems of thought of *Ki Hynniew Trep* on how to live a useful life, good and true on earth to be worthy of God in heaven.

Ki Hynniew Trep were the original settlers of *Ka Ri Hynniew Trep*, known since the advent of the British as the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Prior to its occupation by the British, in the third decade of the nineteenth century, this country extended towards the Brahmaputra on the north, the Cachar Hills on the east, the Surma on the south and the Garo Hills on the west. The people called now the Khasis or Khyriams, Jaintias or Pnars or Syntengs, War, Bhois and Lyngngams according to the region they inhabit are ethnically one and the same, being the descendants of *Ki Hynniew Trep*. In fact, they refer to themselves always as *Ki Pateng Ki Hynniew Trep* (the Descendants of *Ki Hynniew Trep*) or simply *Ki Hynniew Trep* and do so invariably and religiously in prayers and worship. The people generally known as the Khasis inhabit the Khasi Hills, and those known as the Jaintias (Pnars or Syntengs), the part of it called Jaintia Hills. The Wars inhabit the Southern belt of the slopes to the valleys of the Surma; the Bhois and Lyngngams inhabit the northern lower hills extending towards the Brahmaputra Valley. During the British regime they were on the whole called Khasis and Jaintias and after Independence, Khasi-Jaintias or Khasi-Pnars. They also generally refer to themselves like-

wise in ordinary talk and conversation. On all matters of national importance or whenever there is a cause to fight unitedly, however, they take the name of *Ki Hynniew Trep*.

Ki Hynniew Trep literally means The Seven Huts. According to a popular legend of Khasi-Pnars there was a time when all sixteen families, dwelt in heaven. People used to descend daily by the *jingkieng ksiar* (which literally means the 'golden ladder' but is actually meant to refer to a celestial pathway connecting heaven and earth) to come down to earth and cultivate. This continued until one day it was irretrievably destroyed. The seven families or Seven Huts who were on earth thus remained here forever and from them the race multiplied.

This legend has been observed by anthropologists as having an interesting connection with a popular legend of the Mon Khmer people of Cambodia. It refers to fourteen boats of people setting out and seven disappearing mysteriously forever. All ancient cultures refer to a period of 'The Great Flood'. For e.g. the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern region have their reference to Noah's Ark. The Khasi-Pnars believe that they lost their script in this Flood.

Anthropologists do believe that the Khasis are the remnants of the first Mongolian overflow from the traditional cradle of the Indo-Chinese race and that they established themselves in their present habitat at a very remote period. Their language is the only surviving dialect of the Mon Khmer group of languages. There is a distinct similarity between the Khasi language and the Mon Khmer-Palaung dialects prevailing in Burma and Indo-China. Racially, the Khasis are very akin to the Indo-Chinese tribes but are by no means pure Mongoloid. At some early period they must have intermarried with an-

other race predominantly the Austric race. Intermarriage with people of Aryan descent is a recent phenomenon.

The earliest written literary reference to the Khasis is to be found in Sankardeva's Assamese paraphrase of Bhagavata Purana composed around A.D. 1500. However, in various Sanskrit sources notably the chronicle of Kashmir i.e. Rajatarangini, reference is made to a hill people called the Khasas. Those people dwelt chiefly in the mountains of Southern Kashmir where the descendants are to be found to this day. Khasas also are found in Gilgit, Chitral, Kumaon, Garhwal and also the Doti district to Nepal. There are striking resemblances and similarities in some of the jewellery of the Khasas and the Khasis. One school of thought believes that they could be one and the same race having slowly inched eastward to these eastern hills.

Until about a hundred and fifty years ago the Khasis held a strong oral tradition. Parents, aunts and uncles from time immemorial have been handing down from generation to generation to their children, nieces and nephews those principles and precepts delivered in their own words and dialects to inculcate upon them how to live, work and conduct themselves honestly, honourably and decently at home and in society. The Khasis have strong faith in God, the Creator and Dispenser who rewards or punishes people according to their deeds in his own good time, hence, the desirability and necessity for people to be always careful to walk along the path of Truth. Radhon Singh Berry did a masterly job to collect as many of those gems of thought as he could and put them down in writing in the poetic dialect of Sohra published for the first time in book form; Part I in 1902 and Part II in 1903.

Ki Hynniew Trep, like all other tribes in North-East India, were innocent of the art of reading and writing till the advent of the Christian missionaries from the west. It was Rev. Thomas Jones of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists Foreign Mission who first taught them the art by introducing the Roman alphabet.

Rev. Jones sailed from Liverpool on the 25th November 1840 and reached Sohra (Cherrapunji) on the 22nd June, 1841. His mission was to Christianise the people branded by the west as heathens and infidels, not knowing the truth that they have very high moral, ethical and spiritual values.

The Khasi Pnars believe in God who is Omnipotent, Omnipresent and Omniscient. Accordingly they hold it a sacrilege to symbolise Him or picture Him in any shape or form. God's three commandments are:

- 1) *Kamai ia ka Hok* which literally means - "earn righteousness". The import of this commandment is the primacy of the righteous life which *Ki Hynniew Trep* and their descendants should live throughout their lives on earth. To live a righteous life man must not only speak the truth and act fairly and justly in all his dealing with his fellow men but should also be honest in his thoughts and wishes.
- 2) *Tip Briew - Tip Blei*: This literally translates into "Know-man Know-God". The import of this commandment is that Man can only know God when he understands his fellow men. Knowing one's fellow men connotes performance of one's duty to them - which is to be compassionate and helpful to one and all and never to cause harm and injury to anyone for one's profit and pleasure.

- 3) Tip-Kur Tip Kha means “know one’s maternal relations and paternal relations”. The import of this commandment is seen in the social structure of the Khasi-Pnars.

Ki Hynniew Trep take descent from the mother. The children take her surname/clan name. All those who descend from the First Ancestress, “Ka lawbei” form one composite ‘Kur’ - clan. Marriage between members of the same clan is an unforgivable sin and those who fall are outcasted.

There is no curse which we dread more than that which makes his clan extinct. We consider it God’s greatest blessing when the tribe and clan increases. So in our matrilineal society, contrary to the mistaken, idea of outsiders that women rule, a man is doubly honoured.

In his sister’s home he is ‘U Kfi ha ka iap ha ka im’ (an uncle in life and death) for he advises and protects. Although the youngest daughter is the custodian of the family property, she can make no decision regarding property and other major issues without the consent of her maternal uncles. In his wife’s house he is ‘U Kpa uba lah ba ñai’ (a father who is able and steadfast). He is the progenitor, God’s instrument to increase his tribe and the clan of his wife and prevent it from extinction.

Women are respected and are far from subservient but overlordship of women is deprecated. We have a saying “Adur lanot, wei ba la kynih ka ñiar kynthei” (woe worth the day when the hen begins to crow). The woman’s husband’s family, her children’s paternal relations are the ‘Kha’ and always very highly respected. Kha literally means to “give birth”. The women do not participate in administration, legislation and

judiciary in the traditional set up.

So Tip Kur Tip Kha, the third commandment, entails one to do one's duties toward the 'Kur' and 'Kha' adhering with understanding and strictness to the code of conduct and the precepts laid down by the elders from time immemorial.

Ki Hynniew Trep are monotheistic. They do, however, invoke God by various names according to the need of the moment. as God has all the attributes of goodness and all the power to do good. So they call him "lei long spah" when they pray to him to bless them in their venture in trade and business, "lei Khyrdop, `lei Kharai" when they pray to Him in time of war to protect and defend their homeland, "lei long kur" when they pray to him for the increase of their tribe. *Ki Hynniew Trep* are not animists nor do they practise ancestor worship.

There are no specific and formal places of worship, God, the Creator of all fills heaven and earth. Every bit of ground is sacred and, therefore, prayerworthy. So God can be worshipped when one is alone, with other people, anywhere in the open or in one's home so long as the worshipper is clean in his heart.

A Khasi Pnar believes that when he dies his soul wings its way to God to be with the Khyndai Trep (the Nine Huts/Families) above. His body which he refers to a 'ruh pyut' (rotted cage), when purified by fire, returns to mother earth. But that indestructible part of him which he calls 'Ka rngiew' remains on earth to watch over his kith and kin. I could not find an English equivalent of this word 'Ka rngiew'. The nearest I can think of is that it is the essence of a person's personality and being. The Khasi-Pnars cremate their dead.

We have no fixed day of congregational worship. Every day is a day of prayer and every good thought, word and deed an offering and prayer to God. In every way and always he must remember God's commandment - Earn Righteousness (Kama'i ʻia Ka Hok), and walk on the path of Truth.

The pity is that in the colonial days the westerners puffed up by their power and authority looked down upon the subject races as inferior being uncivilized and uncultured. It was much more so in the case of the natives of the Hills who were ignorant of the three R's having no written history or literature, disdaining to learn their oral literature which they dismissed as mere myths and legends of unlettered people dominated by superstition and fear of the unknown. If they had deigned to come down from their high horse to study the tales and traditions of the people, their culture, customs, institutions and noble concept of God-Man relationship, they would have been blessed with the joy of knowing their innate truthfulness, tolerance, goodness and pleasant disposition, glimpses of which shine through the pages of *Ka Jingsneng Tymmen*.

Rev. Thomas Jones believed that the best way to achieve his mission of converting the people to Christianity was by teaching them to read the Bible and other Christian literature in this own language. In his first letter home he wrote: "The only plan which appears to me likely to answer a good purpose is to establish schools in various villages to teach children and adults to read their own language and to instruct them in the principles of Christian religion; or in other words to give them the same kind of instruction as is given in Sunday Schools at home, and not to introduce any other feature, except what may be necessary to draw the children to the schools,

or to train native teachers; and to make use of the natives to teach their fellow-countrymen to read. In this way we shall not only bring up the young people in the knowledge of the gospel doctrines, but we shall also teach them to read; and when we shall have translated the Holy Scriptures into their language, we shall have some, at least, in every family, able to read them, and I may add, able to understand them also, and I would regard this as an important step towards their evangelisation”.

As a very devoted and dedicated man he single-mindedly applied himself at once into the study of the Sohra dialect which he mastered in six months only. He adapted the Roman script to write in this dialect which has since become the literary language of the Khasi-Pnars. In the beginning he established three Elementary Schools within three miles of each other in the cluster of villages constituting Sohra, to pursue the plan he had chalked out. It proved to be a great success judging by the phenomenal progress of Christianity in all the Hill Territories of North-east India wherever Christian Missionaries came to preach the gospel, following in the footsteps of Rev. Thomas Jones. Indeed, till Independence education in the Hill Territories of North-east India was practically in the hands of the Missionaries from the West. The Government kept the people severely isolated, almost insulated, taking little or no interest at all in promoting their economic development or social welfare. All the interest it took zealously was in the maintenance of law and order to make them loyal and obedient subjects to enable the White civilians, top-brass and box-wallahs to regale and relax during the hot weather peacefully and tranquilly in the bracing climate of the Hills away from the heat and the dust of the plains. Were it not for the missionaries the light of

learning would have been closed to the people, even the partial or limited part of it. For the missionaries in the early period carried on with Elementary Schools only, raised later the few Middle English Schools wherever a Mission House was established for the residence of the missionary.

It was only at the turn of the last century that one or two English High Schools were established in Shillong where boys and girls from all the Hill Territories of North-east India came to study. It was for this reason that few families only could afford to give Secondary Education to their children and fewer still able to send them to the plains for Higher Education, and that too, limited to General Education only. But even among the able families only those with an understanding of the value of education did so.

Ka Jingsneng Tymmen Part I contains 41 stanzas of 255 couplets: Part II, 68 stanzas of 374 couplets. The words of wisdom in these 629 couplets of *Ka Jingsneng Tymmen* mirror the ethos of the Khasi-Jaintias marked by their sense of self-respect, self-dependence, tolerance and understanding which makes them by nature helpful, considerate and sociable. This quality of theirs coupled with the beauty and grandeur of their land charms visitors from far and near, their own countrymen and foreigners as well. Rev. J.T. Sunderland, an American missionary, who came to our land on a visit unaffected by the colonialism of European nations, moved by the frank and friendly nature of the people, wrote a poem of 24 lines only, short and sweet, which, like a rosebud spreading out, unfolds the soul of the people. I take the liberty to quote it here as an apt prelude to a better understanding of their concept of life and its living.

KHUBLEI - GOD BLESS YOU

(J.T.Sunderland)

KHUBLEI! "GOD BLESS YOU" so the
Simple Khasi people say,
Whenever they meet each other on
Their hill-side paths.
This is their morning greeting, this
Their evening word,
This is their welcome to friend
Returned from afar,
And this their farewell when from
Friends they part.
KHUBLEI! "God Bless You ",
Is not here a just rebuke to our impiety,
That we, though Christians called,
Habitual meet and part
With speech that hath not on it word
Or thought of God?
Has not the God of all the earth
A lesson deep
Of reverence and humility to teach
To us - to us.
Proud Christian Pharisees - by this
Sweet greeting
Of a simple race? KHUBLEI - "God
BLESS YOU"

It is said that even the best of translations somehow misses certain nuances of the original, gossamer-like beauty of the language, in tune with the nature of the land and the people. Readers of the book in Khasi may not find in this translation, the soft sweetness of the Khasi language of Sohra, evocative of the music of the rain drops pattering on the roof, but they will not miss the essence and depth of its sage counsels which Bijoya Sawian has admirably and remarkably succeeded to bring out and convey.

**JAI AW, SHILLONG,
26-06-1995.**

R.T.RYMBAI



BLJOYA SAWIAN

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

'The Jingsneng Tymmen' was first published ninety-eight years ago in 1897. Almost a century has passed yet its content is neither irrelevant nor archaic. The uniqueness of this work lies in its agelessness and universality for its foundation is Truth-the essence of all religions. The full impact of 'Ka Jingsneng Tymmen' can only be felt after both Part I and II are fully read and understood. It is also important to know that for the Khasis correct behaviour is not mere social grace but is deeply and inextricably connected with their worship of God and their respect of Man and Nature.

They say a translation of any work is a pale imitation of the original. This could not be more true than in this case. I have endeavoured, however, to translate it as accurately and simply as possible for the benefit of young readers, without compromising on the meaning for the sake of rhyme and metre.

Bijoya Sawian
January 1995

PRAYER

Oh God Lord and Master All-Knowing
Who will encourage us to be truthful and wise,
Who will instruct and guide our Kith and Kin
So we may never fall into shame and vice.

I

Nieces, nephews, children, grandchildren,
Come, I'll instruct you and your aura* strengthen;
Sit quiet awhile, listen and contemplate,
With my instructions make no mistake;
Remember all of you are like brothers and sisters,
Never forget to love each other;
With respect always speak to one another,
Don't get used to saying 'ma me' 'ma pha'.**

* *The Khasis believe every person has an aura (rngiew) around him and his or her well-being is indicated by its lustre*

** *The polite and respectful word is 'ma phi'*

II

When you get food always divide
Amongst yourselves, leaving no one aside;
Whenever your parents give you food,
Eat happily, do not fuss and brood;
If ever you want a special dish,
Ask for it, do not grab as you wish;
And if, at home, it isn't there,
Don't rush off to buy without any care;
For you'll become naughty and bad habits accrue
And won't value your parents and cherish them too.

III

Never be greedy and oversatiate.
You'll fall sick and health degenerates;
Even with rice do not overindulge,
You'll be stunted and will not grow much;
If you are too greedy and eat in excess,
People will dislike you, in fact, detest;
They will all make fun and gossip and spread
That you're just like a child who's never fed.



IV

Spout no foul words, young one, for it's a sin,
Bad characters, into your company, don't bring in;
Do not abuse and slander anyone,
Violent acts should ne'er be done;
Do not wander about too far from home,
Play in the courtyard or lawn of your own;
When your parents call you don't pretend not to hear,
Go at once, whether you're far or near.



V

Between brothers and sisters let not envy come in,
Between brothers and sisters ne'er be unyielding;
Always revere your father and mother,
Fold your hands, worship God when you wake up and after;
Respect and emulate your elders too,
In what you say and what you do;
Avoid vulgar and coarse chatter,
In speech, in action always be proper.



VI

To perilous places you should never wander,
To cliffs and crags, fire and water:
Lest you might fall get hurt, get maimed,
Be careful when you go downhill and when you, scale,
Always be obedient, do not rebel,
Listen to instructions and all good counsel;
You will gain a good name and God will bless you,
To-day, tomorrow and forever more.



VII

All you children, nieces and nephews,
Learn good behaviour, the best possible;
Your good reputation will always remain
From season to season as you grow you will gain;
Wherever you walk, wherever you go,
Be modest, be humble, don't let arrogance show;
In the house you are born these you must learn -
How to sit and how to stand;
How to walk and cross your feet,
How to drink and how to eat;
How to talk and how to glance,
How to move, how to advance;
How to work and how to labour.
How to cope with the work you shoulder;
How to dress, how to attire,
How to be modest, how to cover;
How your turban, you will wear,
How to comb and make your hair;
How to give, how to accept,
How you'll live and your life will direct;
Think and ponder be not vain be not proud,
At home or abroad, in or out;
Take not these words lightly
For they come from God Almighty.



VIII

Make a habit to rise early in the morning,
In fact, just when the crow is cawing;
When the rooster, the first time crows
Boys and girls, be at your work and toil;
As soon as you're up light the fire,
Be smart, be active, do not malingering;
Look after your home, sweep, tidy it up,
Inside, outside clean it and scrub;
Then wash your hands and faces too,
The goddess of wealth will be with you;
Unwashed, never touch your pots and pans,
Do wash with care, your feet, your hands;
Then cook your rice and whatever you wish,
Don't eat cold food and leftover dish;
And when the rooster calls again,
Take your tools, your work to begin;
Before that, I repeat, eat properly,
And by sunrise to work be ready.

IX

After the third crowing of the rooster
Start at once for your work, do not linger;
Go fetch your water from the stream, the spring,
But empty your vessels before refilling;
Don't laze around by the fire instead,
People will taunt you, call you ailing cat;
Whether at dusk or whether at dawn,
Do not be lazy, do not stretch and yawn;
Look after your pets and farm animals too,
With all your means, do what you can do,
Then other possessions, them too, oversee.
Always be active, as much as you can be.



X

Don't always sit on your rump for lazy you'll become,
You'll always be late when you go and you come;
Whenever you eat don't be extra slow
Because you'll be late in whatever you do;
Don't be a late riser, listless and lazy,
Always be fresh, alert and busy;
Your body will then be healthy, and strong,
And you will, in turn, live very long;
When offering something give it facing the person,
Don't give from behind, it's wrong, unbecoming;
Whatever you give between your fingers don't grasp,
It's rude, incorrect, it's a serious lapse.



XI

When accepting something do not grab,
It's the monkeys' habit, it's ill-mannered;
If ever anything your path does block,
With your foot do not kick, do not dislodge,
Cross not over an object without attempting to shift,
Such behaviour is only for animals fit;
While walking don't cross over others sitting or sleeping,
It's not only discourteous but may make them ailing*
Never give and offer with your left hand, ,
It's wrong etiquette, it's not refined.

** If one casually crosses over a person it is a sign of great disrespect
and it will effect his aura and the person may fall ill*



XII

Whenever people come and visit you,
Welcome them in and seat them too;
After they have sat awhile,
Offer some tynpew and some kwai;*
Don't fold the tynpew the wrong way round,
To whomever you serve, this fault shouldn't be found;
If for some more lime they do request,
With the tip of the knife do not give, lest
It be compared to sacrifices of roosters and goats,
When with the knife, their necks are massaged and scored;
And when it is time for meals to start,
Women and men must have their places apart**



** In Khasi homes 'paan' (paan leaf and betel nut) is always offered
to a guest.*

*** The author simply wishes to convey that when men are consum-
ing alcoholic drinks before meals women should not be present.*

XIII

When you're amidst people don't suddenly get up
And start to walk away and be abrupt;
When other people are sitting there,
Don't walk before them without any care;
With your body and clothes don't touch them, don't slight,
Hold yourself well, bow a little and glide;
Do not, against them, just like a cat rub,
Whenever you get up on others don't prop;
Don't use a broom where people are present,
If you have to, be careful, be prudent.



XIV

Don't sit with your legs pointing towards others,
If you do, by mistake, then apologize;
Whenever people are passing you by,
Always move aside, don't on their way lie;
When your friends and guests take your leave and go,
Don't immediately turn and shut the door;
Don't also, at once, your garbage expend,
Do wait awhile don't do it just then;
It's rude and abusive, it's just like cursing
Your well-wishers, your kith and your kin.



XV

Whenever you visit your friends and relations,
Before you enter their house, at the entrance
Remember to always wipe your feet clean,
Then inquire if they're out or if they're in;
If they're at home let them welcome you first,
Then enter to discuss your work or converse;
If something, indoors, your way does hinder,
Don't just cross over or brush it asunder;
Pick up with your hands and move it aside,
Place it somewhere where you think it right;
Then proceed and sit in the drawing room,
Don't rush for the fireside too soon;
If you're feeling cold and warmth you do need.
Go ahead but, the hearth, don't touch with your feet.



XVI

When your host offers to serve you something to eat,
Don't say 'yes' too soon, hold back then accede,
When you partake fruit or whatever food,
When you eat, you drink, behave as you should;
Don't drop and litter and dirty the place,
If you do then remove every crumb, every trace;
In the garbage dump outside you throw
And wash all your used utensils also;
Then bring them back all clean and dried,
Put them in their place or somewhere aside.



XVII

When you visit anyone don't overstay,
Niangbulot* they'll call you and wish you away;
Wherever you go, wherever you are,
Your work and your home do always remember;
When you're ready to take your leave and depart,
Put your chair back where it was in the start;
If seated on the floor on mat or sheet,
That too you roll up and smoothen it neat;
From the time you come and the time you leave,
Don't let any faults your hostess perceive;

** a kind of beetle that is very difficult to get rid of*

XVIII

Before you sit down anywhere,
First, with your hands, do feel with care;
Don't casually sit without doing so,
You may get dirty, get embarrassed too;
And when your visit you're ready to end,
Tell your host, your hostess of your intent;
Don't suddenly leave as if you're sulking,
It's extremely ill mannered, it's insulting.

XIX

When at night, from the house, you go and come,
Quietly close the door do not bang and thump;
With your back turned do not close it either,
It's wrong, incorrect, it's unnatural behaviour;
Always pay heed to words of advice,
Adhere to Truth whatever betides;
Also abide by what's morally excellent,
Ne'er feel you're above admonishment;
Don't get habituated to making excuses
For your wrong doings lest the habit increases;
Too much light talk and banter do shun,
It weakens Truth, it upsets its foundation.



XX

Do not abruptly kindle the fire,
In case it harms those sitting near;
Never ever spit just anywhere,
In case it falls on someone there;
Dirty water, too, take care when you throw,
For it might splash on some one too;
If it does so by mistake,
Wash off with water and apologies make;
Mixing too freely is never correct,
You cheapen yourself, lose your self-respect;
Don't gallivant and visit at random,
You'll be looked down upon by everyone.



XXI

In too much horseplay do not indulge
For your mind will not develop much;
To the minimum keep jest and banter,
Or your life won't ripen, your mind won't flower.
By music don't get too influenced,
For your energy will all get spent;
In laughter do always know the limit
Or you'll be likened to the goat who threw a fit;*
On song and dance-again I'll echo-
Waste not too much time for your mind will be shallow;
All that's superficial should make no impact,
Always look beyond what glitters on top.

** referring to the tale of the goat who on seeing the tiger shook uncontrollably.*

XXII

Never butt into conversation with useless chatter,
Do not indulge in malicious banter;
Don't do anything without understanding.
You'll expose yourself, your way of thinking;
Don't accustom yourself to lowly talk,
People will point at you wherever you walk;
Don't abuse and curse and castigate,
For, your own reputation, you will unmake;
Taking oaths and vowing you must avoid!
For it's a sin in front of God.

XXIII

Scandals and embarrassing stories conceal.
Even if they're true do not reveal;
Shameful actions avoid for it isn't right
To carry them out in the dark or the light;
Don't be stubborn in what you do and say,
For your nature will be led astray;
Don't make it a habit to gossip and slander,
For it'll take root in your character;
Be not temperamental in your actions and words,
For your discipline and etiquette will be destroyed.



XXIV

Don't sulk and be moody without any cause,
All good intentions and aims will surely be lost;
Don't be irritable and easily ired,
You'll make enemies wherever you are;
Be gentle and helpful, good-natured and kind,
Others will pay you back some time;
In word and deed don't be in a hurry,
Everything goes wrong and topsy turvy;
In whatever you do, whatever you think.
Be not in a rush for you'll suffer and sink.



XXV

Do not be cantankerous and envious too,
The nape of your neck will surely be hollow;*
Waste not your time longing for others' fortune,
You'll wreck your life and your ambition ruin;
Do not be jealous of other people,
Lest it recoils on you, it's not impossible;
Too tight-fisted too, please do not be,
You just might spoil your destiny;
At others, with an evil eye, don't glance.
One day, you too, may suffer such chance;
When friends and relations are in trouble and pain
Spare not yourself to help with might and main.

** Popular belief is that ill-natured people have hollow napes.*

XXVI

To fishing and angling don't be addicted too much,
You may get your curry but substantial food not;*
Don't be too fond of trapping birds.
Time will be wasted, clothes will be tattered;**
Don't get habituated to searching for honey,
Dangcrous places you'll chance upon, unwary;
Don't get too used to hunting wild game,
You may lose your friends and your good name;
Such pastimes as frequenting the hills and dales.
Such pastimes no one will ever regale;
For women and children you will surely frighten,
For they'll see you wherever they go and they wend;
By bad manners, bad habits do not get destroyed
And shame and vice do always avoid.

** Since the habit is bound to make one neglect one's work and become a bad provider.*

*** Because one will be venturing into thorny bushes.*

XXVII

Alcohol, you shouldn't too much desire,
It has, in it, both fire and water;
Do not ever take these words lightly,
Alcohol does harm you eventually;
Smoking hashish too do not dare,
Impoverished you'll be, for your life you won't care;
As for opium and other stronger drugs,
They'll shorten your life if, in them, you indulge;
From gambling also you should stay far,
Or like a bottomless pit it will you devour;
Keep away from women of bad character,
Or your health and wealth will disappear.
With the opposite sex do not mix without thought,
In adultery, incest you may get involved;
Your reputation will then be sullied and ruined,
To-day, tomorrow and for the years to come.



XXVIII

Your nature should always be moderate,
In your actions and thoughts be temperate;
Do not a life without discipline lead
And let your mind go to seed;
With whatever is not in Truth rooted,
Do not get used or habituated,
Even if it's as sweet as honey,
Avoid it, dodge it and faraway be;
If you go near Evil you will get spoiled,
E'en if you are pure you will get soiled.



XXIX

Do not get married without informing
Your father, your uncle, your kith and kin;
Don't marry into families which are suspect,
Choose someone who's equal in every respect;
Otherwise the world will criticize your action,
Sacrilege once committed keeps on re-occurring;
Once you acquire your in-laws and spouse,
Plan how you'll run your life and your house;
In your speech and action always be proper,
Well-being will be with you forever and ever.

XXX

Marrying those forbidden by custom don't dare,
It's a sacrilege beyond compare;
Intimately don't mix with close relations,
For you just might to temptation succumb;
You just might commit a heinous crime
And your reputation will be begrimed;
Do not cheat and let down anyone.
It becomes a habit and causes your ruin;
Do not ever covet someone else's spouse,
Such a sin will bring the fall of your house;
Do not commit the sin of adultery,
For you'll suffer from guilt and misery;
Do not ever kill and take others' lives,
Capital punishment you'll face and cannot survive;
It's also a crime, a most ghastly sin,
Whether it's known, whether it's hidden;
All these transgressions don't end on this earth,
All these trespasses you'll have to answer to God.

XXXI

Mean well, speak the truth and to righteousness adhere,
Life whether long or short should have its aura;
Love yourself and others you must respect,
You'll gain peace on earth and in the hereafter as well;
Never be careless in work and action,
What you say and do, carry out to perfection;
Be adept and skilful in everything too
Be thorough in whatever you say, whatever you do;
As you grow, blossom and gradually flower,
Keep on improving in your work and labour;
When you're asked to go on work somewhere,
Don't try to avoid and your duty defer;
Wherever you go, whatever you do,
Unto thyself always be true.

XXXII

Always conduct yourself with propriety,
Never be arrogant, never be cocky;
With your kith and kin with deference speak,
Show no pride, to your townfolk and community;
With senseless fights and arguments
Don't get involved lest you lament;
On those who are poor and destitute,
On them don't look down and never be rude;
If ever misfortune on others befall,
Ne'er say 'serves them right' whether they're right or they're
wrong;
Whatever it is, always keep in mind,
It can happen to you too any time;
In life, whatever you do, either good or bad,
Whatever it may be, to you it comes back.

XXXIII

Always with discretion talk and act,
It's an investment that remains intact;
Do not overspend and your earnings deplete,
In drink and food, too, be discreet;
An extravagant life leads to penury,
You'll die alone without people and money;
Do not interfere in other's lives,
It does no good, trouble multiplies;

Concentrate on a life that's good and true,
Good fortune will always be with you;
Never be too inquisitive and too prying,
Never meddle and be too interfering;
Always keep your innocent hearts pure as a pearl.
All ye budding youth , ye boys and girls.



XXXIV

Don't always pamper your whims and fancies,
Detrimental to you are such tendencies;
Indulgences encourage only sin and vice,
They trample on all limits, taboos, advice;
Even to the children of the well-to-do,
Such habits will bring only sorrow and woe;
Even to children born into wealth,
They'll destroy their character and their health;
Be careful, be wary, stick to what is correct,
In matters about how one's life is conducted;
My children, my nephews don't succumb to desire,
God will assist you, so will all your ancestors.



XXXV

Whatever you know whatever you gain,
It's useless if not by Truth sustained;
Even if very rich you become,
If no one respects you what use is the pomp ?
Even if you are very grandly attired,
It's useless for it's only your shame camouflaged;
You may reach the top, sit on horse, elephant,
If your reputation is sullied what use is it then?
Even if you worship with folded hands,
What use is it if you're not honest and kind?
Even if you worship God and Him entreat,
It, within you, goodness is not rooted deep,
Even if you're famous and wellknown worldwide,
If God you don't worship and revere inside,
How long will you escape His wrath, His judgement?
Today or tomorrow you'll come to a sad end;
How long can you escape the scoffing of the world
Hounding you from all around?



XXXVI

All superficial pomp and ostentation
Undermines Truth and is the root of destruction;
Once your character is destroyed,
Whatever you achieve, no one will applaud;
Well-being is assured if by Truth you abide,
Right from the beginning to the end of your life;
Friends, acquaintances and all at home,
Do no wrong deeds wherever you roam;
Don't get ensnared by wicked people,
Be alert, be wary and set an example;
So that you'll always be at one with God,
From now on please remember my words.



XXXVII

Do not get stuck to a porter's job,
It'll get you down, your neck and all;*
Don't get too used to a labourer's toil,
You'll become foolish and your intellect spoil;
Don't beg for food from others' homes,
Self respect and your aura you will lose;
Don't forever get enslaved and in people's homes serve,
Your progeny will gain no respect, no regard;
Do not neglect farming, cultivate your land,
Your property and capital will multiply;
Concentrate on skills that involve your hands,
Your life will be enriched and your mind enhanced.

** Because of heavy loads.*

XXXVIII

Learn to trade and do some business
All of you from North, South, East and West;
Even if capital is a little less,
If you persevere you will progress;
If you work hard it'll always pay,
You'll never run short of food on your plate;
If you shirk work and become lazy,
On yourself you'll inflict woe and penury;
Learn to keep your accounts always straight,
Keep your mind clear when you're asleep or awake;
Also learn from people who come from outside
How to deal with what is wrong and what is right;
Arrange your thoughts, think and ponder,
You will then do well, you will then prosper.

XXXIX

Don't leave people behind when you travel together,
Go and come in company whether from near or far;
If some misfortune occurs on the way,
Render help and service without delay;
All your good manners do not forget,
Your name will be praised your deeds emulated;
God and Man will also give you their blessings.
Your name will always remain bright and shining;
E'en after you're gone they'll tell stories of you
And the deeds you've done so good and true.



XL

The best etiquette if followed fully,
Binds you to your clan and father's family;
The best behaviour will always bring
Many benefits and many a blessing;
Don't take this lightly and dismiss these words,
My children, instruction, never avoid;
Spread and remember my teachings forever,
So you may live civilly amongst each other;
If our children, grandchildren are strong and good,
Parents glow and thrive and in joy exult;
If, however, the opposite should ever happen,
It'll harm the parents, their fate, their well-being.



XLI

Remember, of God you must think all the time,
He's our Protector, our Guide, the Giver of strength;
If Him you worship your halo will glow,
Whatever you do, wherever you go;
Your personality will always be bright,
Whether male or female you'll always look right;
Your clansmen too will shine and glitter,
Your kith and kin will increase and prosper,
Night and day, God you must always adore,
He who created all our ancestors;
He who makes the generations to come,
Him you must worship and to him bow down;
This is the dharam* of the body and soul,
Dear children, this eternal truth is from days of old;
To this 'dharam' adhere and always hold fast,
From now on and until the last;
Bow down your head, fold your hands, venerate,
God will stand by you in the light and the shade;
God bless you all, grow, blossom, prosper,
God bless you boys and girls hereafter.

** rules that govern.*

PART II

INTRODUCTION

Bijoya Sawian, who translated “Ka Jingsneng Tymmen” Part I has now rendered the translation of Part II as well. This small book comprising of the Khasi moral code of conduct was written by Radhon Sing Berry Kharwanlang. It has 68 stanzas and 374 couplets and was first published in 1897. According to Radhon Sing Berry, ‘Ka Akor’ (etiquette) gives dignity both to the giver and receiver. His couplets are a mirror to look at oneself and also reflect the essence of Khasi society.

The birth of the script in 1841 provided the emergence of the Khasi society into a fresh stage of energy and an intellectual consciousness and emotional attachment to one’s own culture. The Khasi society was then stimulated by the great intellectuals of the time. Their writings bear testimony to the uneasiness within the society due to the cultural and religious upheavals with the coming of Christianity and Westernization. There was the writer, Rabon Sing Suka who opened up a new line of thinking, Radhon Sing Berry who lifted “Ka Akor Khasi” to its feet again and Jeebon Roy Mairom who furthered the Literacy Movement.

Speaking of Bijoya Sawian we are reminded of the great contribution made by Jeebon Roy, her maternal greatgrandfather. Hurt by the remark, “The Khasis have no brains. They do not need education beyond class 6,” when permission was sought for the establishment of an ‘Entrance School’ (High school), he dedicated himself totally to the cause of setting up one. He wrote relentlessly and convincingly to the Government until his perseverance paid off. The first Entrance School was established in 1878 where the Telegraph Office is now situated and Jeebon Roy contributed seven hundred rupees. This was the major turning point in the spread of higher education in these hills.

It was Jeebon Roy again who realized the need of a Printing Press in Shillong. In one of his letters to the Chief Commissioner of Assam in 1896 he wrote, "The want of a Press in these hills is a great drawback in the way of developing our vernacular language." The government granted the necessary permission and he established. The Ri Khasi Press in 1896, in Umsohsun, in the compound of his Shillong residence. He employed his eldest daughter in the Press to encourage other women for the first time to rise beyond domesticity and come out and work. It was also Jeebon Roy who realized that the people will greatly benefit from the learning of other languages like Bengali and by reading the Indian classics. After he had written and published Khasi books of the Khasi Alphabet, Numbers, Punctuation etc. and on Literature, History and Religion, he published his translations from Sanskrit to Khasi. He published Hit-Upodesa in 1898, Ramayana and Chaitanya Charittra in 1900 and Buddha Deb Charittra in 1901. His eldest son, Sib Charan Roy translated the Bhagvad Gita.

Bijoya Sawian who majored in English literature from Lady Shri Ram College and completed her M.A. from Miranda House, Delhi University, now adds more flavour and colour to the list of translation works contributed by her illustrious predecessors. She has, indeed, shown her inborn talent and interest in translations.

I am confident that this translation will help people understand the essence of the Khasi philosophy of life as portrayed by Radhon Sing Berry Kharwanlang, over a hundred years ago.

Khublei

Helen Giri
Professor and Head
Centre for Cultural and Creative Studies,
North Eastern Hill University
Shillong

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Translating 'Ka Jingsneng Tymmen' Part II was a major challenge. Some of the subjects Radhon Singh Berry tackled were complex and sensitive and needed considerable study of other societies and other times right up to the present day.

The stanzas, as in Part I, deal with a society that existed hundreds of years ago. Yet they remain unblunted by Time and very little can be dismissed as outdated, not even those with more esoteric connotations.

Lastly, the reading of 'Ka Jingsneng Tymmen' Part I, including the Introduction and About the Author, is an important prerequisite to a better understanding of Part II. I recommend this to all the readers.

Bijoya Sawian

I

In front of elders any time any place,
Speak and behave with humility and grace;
When they enter the room while you're alone or with friends,
Stand up, give your seat, ne'er feel shame or offence;
In front of them in smoking don't indulge,
It belittles their position and dignity very much;
You, too, will yourself expose and disgrace,
Like a boorish upstart who knows not his place.



II

Do not overstep in your words and deeds,
To what elders have to say do listen and heed;
Whether they're right or wrong don't argue and bicker,
Just explain your views and your age do remember;
Even if in education and brilliance you score,
The elders' wisdom you cannot ignore;
They do not indulge in repartee and banter,
They talk of the Truth that sustains us forever;
Never give chores for your elders to do,
For you'll degrade all teachings and traditional values.

III

W herever you walk, wherever you go,
Walk with dignity and correct deportment show;
Don't walk with eyes shifting here and there,
Like the goat who, for grass, searches and scour;
Don't walk so fast that your clother fly asunder,
Walk slowly, your garments should sheathe and cover;
If you expose and uncover carelessly,
You will cheapen your own dignity;
The world will talk and your reputation sully,
Those of you who are haughty, slack and sloppy;
Instead of people admiring you,
They'll dislike you and condemn you too.



IV

W ith any man, woman, any human being
With whom you deal with, ne'er bring in bad feelings;
Don't abuse and taunt for it is a sin,
People may fall ill and their aura weaken;
To be responsible for anyone's misery is wrong,
You'll be answerable to both Man and God;
Someone who continuously abuses and taunts,
People will denounce as the worst of them all;
And if anyone does truly some sickness contract,
All bad feelings towards you they'll surely direct.

V

I f you are calling out to anyone,
Don't say half the name for it's not done;
Call by the name that had been chosen and blessed,
So the name will remain as it should, at its best;
If others, too, by half your name call,
Don't answer, for your aura will weaken and pall;
It also won't make your parents happy,
For they've chosen the name meticulously;
Displeasing your parents is not correct,
It's akin to showing ancestors disrespect;
If ever your ancestors are unduly disturbed,
Your aura, your well-being will lose its lustre.



VI

If anyone calls your name just one time,
Don't ever answer, don't ever reply;
Let them, at least, twice call out to you,
Then turn around and answer them too;
Being called just once is unnatural they say, *
Or it's an enemy who is trying to harm and waylay;
Anyone who dares to call only once,
Should be thrashed and face admonishment;
At night, especially, be very wary,
The guilty should be punished most severely;
To ensnare, to do evil the world won't condone,
This is no new rule, but one of longago.

* *A spirit, supposedly, calls out only once*



VII

If you go buying and selling or on any work,
In a group of three, seven or nine don't set forth; *
It's considered wrong and your job won't be done,
You'll face difficulties and disappointment;
When you leave your house and the first one you see
Is someone who is in some way lacking and faulty,
Cancel your journey most definitely
Or you'll gain nothing, for it's unlucky, **
It may not only be a loss of your investment,
Ill health and worse can also happen.

* *The odd one out may be the cause of conflict*

** *People with defects and certain unfortunate inadequacies, (like those deprived by destiny of marital bliss and children etc) may harbour bitterness and other negative feelings within them When they see some one who is just the opposite of them they may unwittingly send bad vibrations towards that person. If that person's aura (rنگiew) is not strong the vibrations will have a negative effect*

One cannot generalise, ofcourse, there are many evolved beings who take the good and the bad as God's Will and nurse no bitterness within them.



VIII

Listen children, let me now relate,
Who to avoid for one's welfare, one's advantage;*
A man who no moustache does sport,
Like a man should, like a man is endowed;
A woman who doesn't have a feminine mien,
Like a hornless cow who has been maimed;
Widows who, no children, have borne,
Virtuous they may be but they're cows without horns;
Those unfortunate ones who are childless and barren,
They're also unfitting e'en if they're virgins;
Shallow people, empty vessels, them too you must shun,
They come in all shapes, sizes, colour and forms;
Those who have some defect in the body,
Both animals and humans alike, be wary;
These six categories must never be present,
In religious matters and administration.**

* *This is a continuation of the previous stanza. As I said there are, of course, exceptions to the rule. There are people strong enough to overcome cynicism, sorrow and grudges and are always positive and mean well towards one and all.*

** *They may have a wrong attitude and unsound thoughts and ideas.*



IX

A man without a moustache isn't considered worthy,*
He will do no justice to his family,
Like a cow without horns isn't considered auspicious,
She's just like men without moustaches;
A widow is considered not fortunate,**
She's pitied and deprived, she is a destitute;
Those who are childless and can't procreate,
Are usually cantankerous and intemperate:
Just like an empty vessel that's considered unlucky,
Your chances to progress she'll hinder and stymie;
So people with defects remember are not meant
To participate in religious rites and government.

* *An effeminate man*

** *Same explanation as in preceding stanzas*



X

If you meet anyone, any time, anywhere,
Whether in your home or away somewhere,
You must always have a 'paan' together
And inquire about each other's welfare;
Inquire about their health, their well-being,
Their children, grandchildren, their kith and kin;
If the 'paan' you serve some lime does lack,
Give as instructed earlier, do not be slack;*
Remember, to give lime finger to finger isn't right,
It's wrong etiquette and may provoke a fight.**

* *Part I stanza XII*

** *It is unclean and unhygienic and, therefore, can be offensive*



XI

Give the priest the utmost veneration,
For he assists in overcoming all our transgression;
Before God and also before Man,
He prays, he entreats in this earthly span;
The priest is the representative of God,
At all times he must be revered and adored;
You must always give him the highest respect,
Even more than your mother and father, in fact;
For, upon himself, he takes and shoulders,
Your communication with God and the ordeals you suffer.



XII

If ever you encounter ill luck and bad times,
Never blame your parents for it's a crime;
It's one of the worst sacriliges you can perpetrate,
You'll be considered depraved, your name you'll unmake;
Mothers and fathers are like gods remember,
They're responsible for you while you are tender;
Be thankful that they brought you into this world,
Adore and respect them for they are all in all;
Worship, always, at Truth's altar,
Whatever betides never falter;
If ever, a good deed, you do to someone.
Don't expect that the same, to you, will be done;
What you deserve, you will surely obtain,
For God grants His bounty as you must get, you must gain.

XIII

To your friends, men and women, do no wrong,
It's a sin in front of Man and God;
Those whom you call friends, whom you love, you should trust,
They will stand by you, they will, they must;
Those who betray the trust of a friend,
Commits a crime that should be condemned;
Those who do not honour the good deeds of all,
One day will face the wrath of the world;
With such people you should never mix,
Those with no principles and with no ethics;
Being intimate too, with them, is not wise,
They will betray you, some time, without thinking twice.



XIV

Never be untruthful keep away from lies,
Your tongue will be severed and you'll be despised;
Never be untruthful, never tell a lie,
You'll be dragged to court to be judged and riled;
A liar's teeth falls far too soon,
He eats grounded 'paan' though his face still blooms;
Don't be untruthful and from lying refrain,
Or, one day, your name will be blackened and shamed;
Not sticking to Truth is surely a sin.
For many crimes from it do always begin.

XV

When you encounter people don't bump into them,
Step aside, wait awhile, don't be impudent;
With elders and seniors especially,
Step aside and wish them respectfully;
Those going uphill must always make way
For those coming down, without delay;
Those without luggage must step aside,
Whether they're climbing or downhill stride;
Do not be arrogant do not be vain,
Or, one day, you'll regret in sorrow and pain.



XVI

Whenever elders come visiting,
Their bags shouldn't be empty while returning;
Fill them with 'paan' leaves and betel nuts,
You'll be blessed and praised and rewarded;
When they are ready to get up and go,
Bow with folded hands touching theirs too;*
If they are delayed and their departure defer,
Food and lodging you must always offer,
These rules too come from God Almighty,
Ye boys and girls take these seriously.

* *The traditional way of greeting and leave taking among the Khasis.*

XVII

If anyone makes a mistake and slights,
Never keep resentment and malice inside;
Once they've apologized and expressed regret.
Reconcile and learn to forgive and forget;
About others private lives do not inquire,
It's a most self-damaging trait to ever acquire;
Never laugh at others and jeer and taunt,
For you'll surely invite the wrath of God;
I ll-treating the poor no one will condone,
It's a sin you'll have to one day atone.



XVIII

Don't scrutinize other people's wealth,
Wrong ideas will make way into your head;
Don't discuss and talk about it too,
You may encourage someone to murder and loot;
Don't lie and betray for it is wrong,
In front of Man and in front of God;
Don't take interest when money you lend,
Interest depletes the borrower's funds;
Whatever you earn from interest and gambling,
Should never be mixed with your actual earnings,
For such money is always considered ill-gotten,
It sullies your wealth and reputation.

XIX

Don't gloat over something that comes to you free,
You may feel satisfied but it sparks off your greed;
Being in debt all your life is a sorry condition,
You may also be smirched at the time of expiration;
With your debts and other liabilities,
Don't avoid paying and going scot free;
Whatever it is, you will have to pay,
If not just now, then some other day;
Don't bicker and fight within the family
And live like foes and in misery;
The goddess of wealth* never stays in such homes,
Rancour, instead, will come and take hold;
To all your belongings give care and respect,
Or you won't get the blessings of the goddess of wealth.

* *Lukhimai (Lakshmi to Hindus)*



XX

Don't try to appropriate some one else's belonging,
Be scrupulous with each and everything;
From others' homes never beg and ask
For food and drink or any repast;
It's bad manners, you know, and wrong etiquette,
And you'll just undermine your self respect;
Old wood and old clothes from others' don't take,
It induces bad luck and your joy will unmake;*
The sanctity of your home will be defiled,
The goddess of wealth will be reviled;
Other's misfortune, your house, will pervade,
Its foundation on Truth will crumple and shake.

* *There is a belief that in a house where there is misfortune, bad luck seeps into everything the owners possess. So if you take something from such a house part of that misfortune comes along with it.*



XXI

Never go back on your promise, your word,
Once spoken, fulfil it, whether it's easy or not;
Once you have agreed to help anyone,
Stick to your word right to the end:
Don't vilify and go back on your word,
Till cotton sinks and iron be buoyed;*
Greeting anyone in just any way is no use,
If not done properly it's more an abuse;
Remember, death is better than shame and dishonour,
Whatever betides avoid sin and error.

* *Never.*



XXII

Before you decide to woo anyone,
First find out what clan she comes from;
Inquire with care in case the match is taboo,*
Speak with respect and regard, all of you;
Never scoff at someone who is not good to look at,
For, one day, your words, you'll surely regret;
For, remember, whenever you are mocking and taunting,
It's not them you are deriding and denigrating,
You are ridiculing and jeering at God, the Creator,
Who, like He did the sun and the moon, created with care;
Whatever they're wanting in their physical form,
It's not their doing, it's the work of God.

* *Marrying into one's clan is an unforgivable sin amongst Khasis.
There are also other considerations and calculations of
relationship before the match is approved.*

XXIII

If, of some one, you are talking about,
Don't, with your fingers, ever point out;
People will feel hurt and feel insulted,*
They can even take you to be judged;
Don't point your finger at anyone,
You'll pale their aura and their life will be shortened;
Don't attempt to count the stars in heaven,
You'll surely fail and end up gaping;
Whatever is beyond your depth and limit,
Never even think of trying for it.

* *Pointing one's finger at some one is taken as a sign of accusation for some wrong doing.*



XXIV

The first scoop out of the rice pot,
Goes to the men of the house, without any doubt;
If the women avail of this privilege instead,
The world won't give the men respect;
Ladies, when you serve food every day,
Till the meal is over don't move away;
Or it'll be likened to serving to animals,
Even if you're innocent, it'll rankle;
Turning your back to your guest is rude,
Turning your back to the rice pot is crude;
It'll seem as if you are sulking and angry,
It's wrong to behave so in company.

XXV

Don't get attuned to being a liar,
Don't be argumentative and to be disgraced, aspire;
While eating do not talk too much, don't chatter,
It mayn't be pleasing to all the others;
Talking while eating is not correct anyway,
The food is not digested and wasted away;
If you do not concentrate while you are eating,
You won't feel satisfied, you won't feel content;
Like a drug addict you'll gorge and people will comment,
That you are nothing but slothful glutton.



XXVI

The mouth of an empty cone shouldn't towards the front
room face, *
For it'll invite bad luck and eventual disgrace; **
The cone, from its strap, you should always separate,
So that your body will relax, your tiredness abate;
Twigs and branches shouldn't be burnt in the fire,
For you'll put yourself in harm and danger; ***
On your house don't have any iron exposed,
For the wrath of thunder and lightning you'll provoke; ****
The affairs of your home don't let outsiders manage,
For your customs and rules they have no knowledge.

* *In traditionally designed Khasi homes the front room (drawing room) is the main room where guests are received and pujas are held and it always faces East.*

** *Any container that is empty is not considered lucky.*

*** *Twigs and branches are likely to crackle and spark out of the fireplace.*

**** *Iron attracts lightning.*

XXVII

When you are carrying an empty water container.
Into someone's house do not enter;*
If by mistake you do, make amends, don't tarry,
Outside, tipple it as if to empty;
In the proper way do your apologies make,
Say you simply forgot or you made a mistake;
Say whatever ill luck such a deed begets,
You, upon yourself, do take and accept;
Bless them all and wish them good health,
For that day and all the years ahead.

* *Same explanation as in stanza XXVI*



XXVIII

Don't ever give people a light from a lamp,
It's a sin in more ways than imagine you can;
The lamp, to the house, gives light and radiance,
The lamp envelops the house in its brilliance;
The lamp signifies the presence of the goddess of wealth,
Before you light it give it respect;
Just as we bow towards the East at dawn,
In the same way, the lamp, we must revere and adore;
The lamp gives light to the house where we dwell,
It enhances its beauty like clothes and jewels.

XXIX

Upon yourself don't bring trouble and woe.
With harmful objects do not point and show;
Your aura will be marred with ire and resentment,
If towards yourself and others you point a weapon;
So if with axe and knife you point and aim,
The blessings of Biskorom* you will not gain;
You may be aiming frivolously,
Yet you may just cause a tragedy;
Children, you should never play with weapons,
This act is, by God, strictly forbidden;
If ever, at anyone, you aim by mistake,
Stop using the weapon and apologies make.

* *The God of industry and Master Builder*



XXX

When a man's wife is heavy with child,
A few things the man must avoid for awhile:*
He shouldn't get involved in funerals and cremations,
It is not good for the new life that's forming;
Thatching his roof from the front to the back,**
Iron smelting with its violent acts,
All this will affect the unborn child,
It'll also affect his pregnant spouse;
The women should also be avoiding
Sad occasions,*** knitting, stitching and basket weaving;
There are other activities too one must shun,
Husband and wife see that all this is done.

* *It is believed that a baby does not only inherit the physical attributes and mental qualities of the parents, while it is in the mother's womb it also absorbs the parents' thoughts and feelings.*

** *Completing any work is also forbidden since the birth process of the child is still incomplete. Everything the parents do should be in harmony with the miracle of the new life emerging.*

*** *because they are taxing for the eyes.*



XXXI

Listen, ladies please be serious
About the following rules for they're genuine not facetious;
When you are pregnant it is a law,
Not to look at those who have a flaw;
Or the unborn child will surely be affected,
The personality of the person will, on the baby, be reflected;
So while your child is vulnerable and may suffer,
With the wrong people to associate don't consider;
No one, an abnormal child, do desire,
But if you are careless this affliction you'll suffer.

* *Same explanation as in stanza XXX*



XXXII

To all the elders who are appointed to reign,
Always show respect in every way;
The kings, the rulers who are chosen and elected.*
It's good for your country if you show them respect;
When you respect the lords and nobility,
When you respect your royalty,
Truth is affirmed and in the land there's contentment,
The ruling deities are also strengthened;
O! rulers, ministers, lords alike,
Protect your subjects day and night;
Protect and instruct from the hills and valleys,
Take upon yourself the hard and the easy.

- * *In the Khasi Hills there are big states, 'hima' and smaller ones, 'elaka' A 'hima' is ruled by the 'syiem' (chieftain) who is elected from the royal clan by the ministers (myntri) - the representatives of the important clans of the hima The 'elakas' are ruled by sirdars, wahadadars and lyngdohs The lyngdohs are always elected from the lyngdoh (priestly) clan The rest can be from any clan All of them are elected by the people of that particular elaka To this day all these rulers have special administrative and judiciary powers and are still highly respected The British did not conquer the Khasi Hills but signed treaties with the syiems*



XXXII

Never ever cheat while buying and selling,
Purposely or through careless handling;
Your money won't multiply, you will not prosper,
Instead you'll lose and eventually suffer;
Even if you measure metre by metre,
And you weigh litre by litre,
Or you sell in bulk in bags and vessels,
Or collectively in baskets and barrels,
Be honest in the light and in the dark,
Lest you lose everything and finally starve.



XXXIV

When you're about to set out on a journey,
If some one sneezes stop awhile and tarry;
When you are about to go somewhere,
From your home, your town, here and there,
If you stumble and fall, hitting foot and head,
And your dress gets entangled and you fall instead,
Stay back awhile, delay your going,
In case you have to face wreck and ruin.

** If all this happens it may mean that your health is not good and you should look into it before you proceed.*

XXXV

While eating never fight, never argue
Amongst yourselves and with other guests too;*
It's a sin, every grain will damn you, will curse.
For it's like dogs at feasts grabbing leftovers;
While eating if ever you happen to sneeze,
Stop eating, wash your hands and rinse your mouth clean;
Before you resume to eat again,
Do cough a little, make a pretence;
If you sneeze while partaking 'paan' or eatables,
Or any victuals, viands, edibles,
Spit a little in your hand and throw it behind
And say 'whoever is remembering me wait awhile.'

* *It is extremely bad manners and food which sustains us must be given the respect it deserves.*

Sneezing is rude and unhygienic and apologies are, therefore, an unavoidable and important formality.



XXXVI

While eating don't sit with your legs apart,
Men and women this fault do avert;
While eating don't sit with your legs outstretched,
Alone or with others, this isn't correct;
Don't also sit crouched up and knees separate,
Just like a cat waiting to misappropriate;
The above mentioned ways of sitting while eating,
Expose and disgrace your own upbringing;
Whenever you are taking or serving food,
Don't slide the plate for it is crude;
Lift it up with grace, give it to be filled,
This is correct and according to God's will.



XXXVII

While serving food heed this advice,
In front of guests or otherwise,
Serving spoons shouldn't face the wrong way round
For it isn't correct, it isn't sound;*
Your etiquette you cheapen too,
Your guests' well-being you will undo;
When you serve food to anyone,
Whether it's easy or a problem,
Give it with a feeling of generosity
And you will be blessed eventually.

* *It will seem as if you are not keen to serve as the food will obviously keep falling off. More than that this detail is meant to establish the fact that serving food is a formal act.*

XXXVIII

Once you're awake get out of bed,
Don't cover yourself with the quilt instead;
Visitors will think you are indisposed,
So, though hale and hearty, your health you may lose;
They are bound to inquire, "Is he sick and ailing?"
And on discovering the Truth they'll end up ridiculing;
Not only then will they laugh and jeer,
Even while returning they'll smirk and sneer;
If people malign you as they go on their way,
It effects your health and your aura wanes;
They'll gossip not only of you lingering in bed
But the bad manners and habits that it reflects.



XXXIX

Don't have a confrontation with your in-laws,
In matters big or matters small;
It's truly a disgrace if you ever do,
What you feel for your wife bestow on them too;
Inlaws, especially your maternal uncle-in-law,
Hold in the highest esteem, respect without flaw;
When you converse, do so with deference,
In all your dealings be very tolerant;
In the same way your inlaws will treasure you too,
A son-in-law is an adornment of great value.

XL

When a couple have a misunderstanding,
Parents shouldn't be interfering;
Parents of either boy or girl,
If they interfere it'll get worse;
A minor issue will surely inflate,
If parents meddle and manipulate;
It will cause a long drawn out rift,
If many are involved in a messy conflict;
If there's a valid reason, however,
Parents should render advice and succour.



XLI

Ladies, when you converse, you confabulate,
When you smile your teeth shouldn't be displayed;
When you still don't know the person well,
Excessive laughter and familiarity you must suppress;
Or you'll cheapen yourself and spoil your name,
People will gossip and, you, defame;
They'll say, "she is a woman of loose character,
She's bound to fall short in her behaviour;
Be wary of her, avoid her too,
Children, kith and kin near her don't go."

XLII

Don't give a woman too much freedom,
For worldly wise she can never become;*
Her womanly grace will degenerate,
For she'll unreasonably argue and castigate;
She won't bother of consequences big and small,
She won't realise what is right, what is wrong;
Don't give her too much liberty,**
For she may lose her dignity.

* *Women are highly respected in Khasi society but it also maintains that women are emotional and cannot always be objective and reasonable.*

** *In major activities and decision making beyond her home. There are, ofcourse, women who are exceptions to the rule*



XLIII

Every woman is akin to the goddess of wealth,
She keeps the earnings in safety and all in good health;
The woman is the foundation of the home,
She accepts both good luck and misfortune;
The woman like the mother-in-law of the bee,
Is more beautiful when filled with serenity;
The woman is endowed with the sun's glory,
She glows and revels in her purity;
The woman is like a golden seal,
She's thrifty and guards the treasury;
But if like a man she tries to be,
She'll destroy her honour and dignity;
Her home, too, will be destroyed forever,
Her kith and kin will also suffer.*

- * *If the woman of the house is too busy to look after her home and family everything goes wrong. The husband and children deprived of essential emotional support and a stable home, which only a wife and mother can provide, may turn to all sorts of vices and the family may end up in sorrow and misery.*



XLIV

If ever you travel through a dangerous route,
For the woman to lead isn't good;
The nongshohnoh* and murderers, we find,
Always, lay in wait, to attack from behind;
If the woman is ahead she won't be harmed,
For the criminal will be scared it may provoke the man;
He'll also be scared to kill the man in front,
In case the woman begins to scream and run;
In this way both will be saved from danger,
This advice comes down from yesteryears;
In everything else, too, the man should lead,
To this rule the woman must accede.

- * *Those who kill people in order to obtain blood for the snake vampire, who in return supposedly gives them wealth and good fortune It is an unproved fear, one of the legends of the Khasis.*



XLV

Don't get swayed by attraction when a woman is adorned,
When her true self emerges it'll be a different response;
You are bound to regret and go back on your word,
Then people will give you no respect, no regard;
The wedding feast is finished not yet,
But the marriage is over, attraction is dead;
It'll be a problem for the whole community,
And you'll have to pay the penalty;
If you have children the matter gets worse,
Poor innocent souls have to bear the cross.



XLVI

Once you have married and linked with a clan,
Don't leave your wife while she's pregnant;
With your own offspring you'll lose all contact,
He or she won't know you, in fact;
This misdemeanour won't finish that day,
Your kinswomen may suffer in the same way;
So if anyone commits this heinous sin,
He will be called one who's without kith and kin;
He will be ostracized by everyone,
He'll destroy his life and existence.

XLVII

Do not trust everything on a foolish friend,
He may let you down, though loyalty is intense;
Especially in work of considerable weight,
With such a friend one shouldn't associate;
He cannot function according to priority,
He cannot differentiate between defeat and victory;
Mindless love can be one's worst enemy,
Care and caution brings more profit, eventually;
One may not fall prey to a cunning foe,
One can, to a foolish friend, and suffer more.



XLVIII

Don't ever take any issue lightly,
For you won't benefit from such laxity;
Gorges and cliffs don't pose constant harm,
But if you are too carefree you'll keep falling down;
Do not trust each and everyone you meet,
Until you get acquainted, with care do proceed;
After all, blood is blood and pus is pus, it's known,
Meat is meat after all right down to the bone;*
So in all you do, be serious, be wary,
Or things take an unwanted course and you'll be sorry.

* *People can be judged and understood by their past and family background. Also, as a rule, one's blood relatives do not let one down.*

XLIX

Once you've started some good endeavour,
Until its fruition you must work and labour;
Don't avoid responsibilities that go with it,
Or you'll lose your investment, you won't profit:
If you keep delaying and your duty defer,
You'll miss opportunities and will not go far;
This is the way one loses one's wealth,
For one has not nipped, what's wrong, in the bud;
Once you miss the chance you'll end up gaping,
Whatever you aim at you'll keep on missing.



Listen ye children, ye boys and girls,
Let me, to you, the story reveal;
Listen, understand so you may be wise and know,
This is what has been told since days of yore;
Since the beginning of the world, the beginning of time,
When God made Woman and God made Man,
He instructed them with great depth and deliberation,
In every single matter, in every single question;
Above He kept nine families,
Below He settled seven families.*

* Reference is the legend of *U Lum Sohpetbneng*

LI

God, the Creator has one rule ordained,
That we must worship only Him again and again;
So remember all ye boys and girls,
Him and Him alone you must revere;
Adhere to the covenant made in days of yore
Between God and those above and those below;*
All of us and those who come after,
Blasphemy and sacrilege we shoul'n't perpetrate ever;
It's a matter of life and death, sins so great,
Sins that can your life devastate;
It's an offence of great enormity,
Committed by you in front of God Almighty.

* *Referring to the same legend as in previous stanza.*



The act of worshipping and revering God,
Is a discipline we must all accord;
If you don't believe in and follow true religion,
How will you instruct and guide your clansmen?
Religion is the foundation that strengthens your aura,
The clan is the foundation of your being, the mother;
Adhere to your religion and protect the clan,
Whatever you do, do within its span;
Religion is the manifestation of the Creator and Dispenser,
The clan is the body, the spirit that lasts forever.

- * *The clan is the most important aspect in the social framework of Khasi society. Each and everyone belong to a clan, is a product and member of a clan.*



LIII

Children, whatever is not based on Truth don't entertain,
Mindless desires avoid too, for it's a shame;
In matters regarding matrimony,
And in issues connected with religious duty,
In the dealings with people in everyday existence,
In the rituals of worship and reverence,
On Truth alone base your acts and conviction,
Think and perform according to convention;
Then you'll be content in every sphere,
And you'll be at peace with God the Creator.

LIV

When your kith and kin have trials and tribulation,
Never refuse help and co-operation;
Whether they can repay your kindness or not,
Don't wait to confront them, don't keep a grudge;
If they have a feast go and join graciously,
If they don't invite you don't sulk needlessly;
Around food and drink your life shouldn't revolve,
Eat and drink only enough to be healthy and strong;
One who lives only to eat is, to a beast, akin,
One who eats to live is an evolved being.



LV

Never act as if you know everything,
In your words, your deeds and all your dealings;
For you may have to eat humble pie soon,
And carry regret on your shoulders alone;
In every move consult others too,
In what you say and what you do,
Ask one who can see deep inside and beyond,
And those well versed in facts and figures;
To be taciturn and arrogant leads to misery,
You'll suffer and sink into difficulty.

LVI

It's not advisable to venture out alone,
Always try and go with some one you know;
In case you succumb to danger and die,
No one will ever even know why;
Even a very small impediment,
If alone, can trouble you no end;
And if bad luck, on you, illness inflicts,
You'll face e'en more trouble and many conflicts;
You may, also, some wild beasts encounter,
And wicked people, murderers, molesters;
So many difficulties you'll have to fend,
And may, finally, meet with an unnatural end.



LVII

In deeds and demeanour don't be imprudent,
For, surely, you'll suffer and regret in the end;
In your conversation don't sound high and mighty,
If you ever blunder people will taunt without mercy;
To be rash in your action and arrogant in words
Is self-destructive and gives no reward;
So in action and speech be reticent,
In case you regret and can make no amends.

LVIII

When you go for an outing or any sport,
For fishing or recreation of any sort,
Boys and girls do conduct yourself well,
Don't give people a chance to gossip and tell;
When you all go together where no elders are present,
So you won't fall into trouble be wary, be prudent;
Don't ever cheapen your character,
Or the world will malign you and defame and slander;
They'll dislike you even if they pretend otherwise,
When your back is turned they'll abuse and revile.



LIX

A flower that some one else has worn,
Never wish that it should you adorn;
And once you've worn a particular flower,
Others shouldn't get its fragrance, don't let them get near;
By all this I mean avoid the act so vile,
Of trying to seduce some one else's spouse;
You'll commit the sacrilege and unforgivable sin,
That is, to both sexes, strictly forbidden.

LX

Be equally clear in your body and attire,
Equally particular in your worship and labour;
For if in both you aren't clean and neat,
Your mind will be unclear and very weak;
If there's something amiss in your work and worship,
Your life, your peace will be afflicted;
If your body and attire are immaculate
And if you are true in your work and worship,
You'll be healthy and strong in body and mind
And you'll be showered with blessings of every kind.



LXI

Children, listen to me and hear me well,
To gain wealth too soon is detrimental;
You may gain in wealth and material goods,
But being young you can't cope as well as you should;
Have you ever heard my children dear,
It's wrong to argue while you're still tender?
With words you may be clever for sure,
But in the ways of the world you still are so raw;
Too early affluence means early demise,*
Too early fame is shallow, unwise;
True wealth belongs to the matured and prominent,
True words are of those who are experienced and seasoned;
Who can read, when eggs are cast, the subtle signs,**
Who understand life and death, defeat and triumph.

- * *One may be too immature to be able to use wealth wisely and may over indulge in drugs, drinks, gambling and other vices. All this will obviously lead to ill health and worse.*
- ** *Referring to the special pujas performed when we seek answers and remedies for inexplicable happenings in our lives since other disciplines like astrology, palmistry etc. were not known to us.*



LXII

If ever some one does you ill treat,
Never take revenge or retaliate;
Don't also bear and nurse a grudge,
Right then or even afterwards;
Anyone who, a resentment, harbours,
Brings misery upon himself and also others;
Thinking of revenge is a destructive crime,
Nursing animosity destroys you in time;
It festers and spreads all forms of iniquity,
It'll catch up with you and you'll be sorry;
How can you nurture bonds and forge new ones,
When you, constantly, have dark thoughts about everyone?



LXIII

If ever you commit a sin,
In the dark or in the open,
If ever you fall into calamity,
Whether it's daunting whether it's easy,
Never, on others, put the blame,
Or you'll face many many a travail;
It's wrong to falsely accuse some one,
Misery and suffering to you will come;
It's a sin like lying and betraying after all,
A sin that brings some one else's downfall.

LXIV

Do not carve and sculpture the wood of your home,
It's against our religion and it'll lead to doom;*
The roof and, above it, the hearth, the platform,
The pillars and supports that bolster construction,
Don't use as firewood if they fall or rot,
Leave them aside, to sell too, you should not;**
Or all sorts of difficulties you'll have to face,
For the shadow of 'tyrut' will envelop your place;***
Once this curse sets in in the core of your home,
A little mistake and you are forever doomed.

- * *The wood used to build our homes shelter us so we should respect it and not 'hurt' it for the sake of decoration Besides carved pillars and supports are not as solid and strong*
- ** *In the same way and for the same reason we should give the wood respect when it is no longer of use*
- *** *'Tyrut' is a curse that stems from an act of violence Even firewood is cut just enough for use Since ancient times there are stretches of what are known as sacred forests where no tree is cut, no bird and animal shot. Preservation of all God's creations is also part of culture.*



LXV

To be surreptitious with your money is unethical,*
In your mother's home or that of your spouse;
Even hiding any other material possession,
Will injure your health, weath and position;
Not only on you will it impinge,
But also upon your kith and kin;
This scourge will not leave you do remember,
Till your family is destroyed forever and ever,
This underhand act is a damage so serious,
A breach that can't be easily redressed.

* *This attitude signifies an unhealthy mind that harbours selfishness and dishonesty.*



LXVI

When some great misfortune on you befalls,
Don't, wail and shriek making others' flesh crawl;
Don't blame others for what has ocured,
Don't blame others for what has transpired;
Don't point your finger at anyone,
Or cry just to fool others and pretend;
Don't blame God for the misfortune,
It's a sin, a most heinous transgression;
The whole world will speak ill of you,
You shouldn't argue with or berate God, you know;
Cry and mourn as you should as you ought,
For life and death is pre-ordained by God;
Children, correct etiquette is ever important,
Even in the life and death cycle that affects everyone.

LXVII

Children, don't be too forthcoming with your opinion,
While you still belong to the young generation;
For Truth you can't fathom and will instead, misread,
For you're too young to grasp, too young to perceive:
You may even end up seeming a liar.
And get chided and punished and unnecessarily suffer;
The meaning of Truth your elders will explain,
Don't argue and bicker lest you're left gaping in shame:
To interpret and guide is the privilege of an elder,
Who is truly experienced and talk without error.



LXVIII

Everyone of you both men and women,
Never take the blame for anyone;
Both men and women everyone of you,
Don't make others take the blame too;
You can't escape retribution even if you try,
Instead you'll be defamed and called a liar,
God has carved each one's life in a distinctive way,
So we should honour His will and not betray;
Whether you thrive or suffer in your own destiny,
You'll, atleast, have the grace of the Almighty.

C O N C L U S I O N

O! Wondrous Khasi Culture,
Where are you now?
In the peoples' hearts and souls,
Or where you are listened to no more?

119/SCL,1